Sophia and Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip

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Sophia and Magdalene in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip

Part 1

The Role of the Sacred Feminine in the Gnostic Pantheons and the Mystery of the Bridal Chamber

Introduction

Hierarchies that developed in the Gnostic magical pantheons were constructed on an etiology of a fallen, corrupted cosmos. Springing from a syncretic Hellenistic culture with Platonic, Oriental, Jewish and Christian influences, these cosmologies were extremely versatile; but generally were composed of 30, 12 or 8 pairs of aeons, called syzygies. (A quick reference of commonly used Gnostic terms can be found at the end of Part 1.) In this essay we will be examining the relationship

between the male-female figures in the magical pantheons of Gnosticism, i.e., the syzygies of the Pleroma, or the "Fullness." Special emphasis will be on the principal female figure in Gnostic mythology, Sophia, the transcendent goddess who emerges in the Hellenistic world.

For Plato, the true home of the soul was in the stars, and the object of human experience was to climb through the various planetary spheres and return the soul to its disembodied spiritual existence. This philosophy is now seen by many to be the origin of western dualism. In much Gnostic speculation, even the upper realms of the cosmos have been demonized. Spiritual goodness is far above the heavens; it dwells beyond human concept in the

realm of "depth and silence." The upper planetary region is frequently viewed as a place of evil spirits; heaven has become a place that is as unsafe as earth.

The human being, in most Gnostic cosmologies, cannot pursue the life of the earth and the spirit simultaneously and a recurring theme is how to balance transcendence and sexual power. We see this reflected in the preoccupation Gnostic writers had with the Genesis story, and will examine this problem in more depth in part two of this article.

In general, the Hermetic and Kabbalistic writings which evolved (simultaneously and subsequently) from Oriental Hellenism rejected the Gnostic theme of anti—cosmic dualism, affirming instead that the cosmos is an expression of the

immanence of God, within which human beings stand in intermediary relationship, mediating microcosm to macrocosm. I personally see a number of philosophical differences between the magical pantheons in Kabbalistic and Gnostic cosmologies, a principal one being this problem of dualism. However, numerous scholars have sought to uncover the more redemptive aspects of Gnosticism, such as the role of women in the social hierarchy as well as philosophical revelations which point to a more unified view of nature and cosmos, God and humans. In particular, as I hope to demonstrate in the next section, the problem of Gnostic dualism is beautifully resolved in the Gospel of Philip.

Most "syzygos" of the Gnostic pantheons are composed of one of two kinds of pairs: those of opposite gender and those who reflect the upper and lower images of each other. The ambiguities of the Pleromatic beings are often revealed in these pairings. In the Apocryphon of John, for instance, Sophia’s image, Pronoia, is seen as a feminine higher self and as Sophia’s mate: the "First Man," perhaps another name for Adam. On a lower level, Adam's mate is Epinoia, whose function is to act as his spiritual savior. In turn, Adam and Eve’s marriage seems to be based on the relationship between Sophia and the First Man. The final redemptive scheme is in both a spiritualized, sexual partnership and in the identification of the lower Sophia with her higher Pleromatic image.

Nonetheless, the text is unclear (or at least ambivalent) regarding the female's own innate capacity to save herself. In many Gnostic texts, she clearly is deluded, and in need of redemption; in others, like this one, she is sometimes spoken of as "male," who, in restoring herself to the world of the aeons, redeems humankind. This example demonstrates some of the problems inherent in Gnostic cosmologies when attempting to formulate some kind of coherent identity of the sacred feminine and her role in the redemptive process.

The image of Sophia/Wisdom as goddess in the ancient world and role model for women is fraught with ambivalence and engenders strong arguments from feminist researchers in both directions. Some see her as a mere

object of a misogynist bias which served only to reinforce the deepening dualistic paradigm perpetrated by a virulent patriarchalism. This theory holds that the myth denigrates the body, matter, and other associations traditionally thought of as ‘female.’ The other theory asserts that Gnosticism held many options for interpretation based on an endless variety of personal inclinations and, as an ancient religion, thus held open many opportunities for women not available in the orthodox Christian church. (1) Because the myths contain a plethora of images of Sophia-sometimes confusing or contradictory, to be sure--the avenue is open for an investigation into themes which challenge the stereotypical associations of an ‘anima’ image as fertility goddess or nurturing Mother or passive recipient of a masculine Logos.

Indeed, as we will see, the images of Logos and Sophia become thoroughly enmeshed in Gnostic myth and, in my opinion, this happens for reasons other than social or political—reasons which reflect the more esoteric or arcane dimension of this mystery tradition.

I will begin this exploration by examining the dual nature of Sophia in her upper and lower aspects, follow with an analysis of the ambivalent image of the Sophia figure, particularly in her relationship with Mary Magdalene and her intimate association to Christ and the role of the 'redeeming Logos,' and conclude with an explanation of why I believe the ritual of the bridal chamber was such an important element in early Gnostic sects. Throughout, we will be searching for themes of the transcendent

feminine and consciousness evolution in the ancient world.

Evolution of the Cosmology and the Ambivalent Roles of Sophia

Gnostic scholar Hans Jonas tells us that the principal ideas pervading all of Gnosticism, and perhaps all of the mystery religions of the Hellenistic world are dualism and divine tragedy. He notes: "A Gnosticism without a fallen god, without a benighted creator and a sinister creation, without alien soul, cosmic captivity and a cosmic salvation, without the self-redeeming of the Deity—in short: a gnosis without divine tragedy will not meet specifications."(2)

The themes of a "bad" creation or

Creator need not remind us of some demonic plot: it is, rather, part of the grand tragedy. This idea was prevalent in many of the ancient mystery religions which postulated magical initiations as a means of releasing the soul from its entrapment in matter. Returning again to the Platonic concept of dualism, we must view it in light of an awakening consciousness: if something indeed survives the body (rather than simply returning to the earth, as in the ancient fertility rites), then that something must be an immortal soul. For Plato, the human rational faculty is the pre-existent part of the soul. The truly wise turn away from the conflicts of human striving to the archetypal Idea.

Humans participate in the world of ideas through the power of the Logos, the

rational Word. Religious scholar Rudolf Bultmann, in his Primitive Christianity, sees this vision of Ideas as indeed the new religion of the age from which emerges the image of Transcendent Deity and ever—expanding cosmos. In the face of the existential dilemmas of the time "life is turned in upon itself and anxious about itself. . . it loses its sense of security against the external world and feels overwhelmed by its environment. Hence it must learn anew its origin and goal.. This explains Plato's adoption of the teaching of the mysteries on the journey of the soul, its pre—existence and fall." (3)

The image of the Transcendent cannot exist without such philosophical speculations that are inherently dualistic, however negative these dualisms came

to be perceived as history developed. It is the radical nature of dualism that influences most theologies which concern themselves with the doctrine of salvation. Gnosticism, in particular, is a redemptive religion based on dualism. In Gnostic, Christian, and Platonic philosophy, dualism evolved as an important part of salvation doctrine. However, in orthodox Christianity, the body is not viewed in the negative light accorded it in Gnosticism, for resurrection implies salvation for the body as well. This is, perhaps, one of its most unique features, and was a chief reason why orthodoxy condemned Gnosticism as heresy.

Hans Jonas identifies three principal outside influences which impacted this most revolutionary period in Hellenic

development: Jewish, Babylonian, and Persian religion. (4) From these ancient cultures we see the beginnings of theological abstraction, e.g., in the concepts of monotheism, cosmology and dualism, which many identify as indications of the evolving ego in humanity. This takes form as the spirit of the individual which recognizes itself as a unique soul which chooses the return journey to its transcendent home in the stars. In the late Hellenistic world and in early Christianity, where religion was becoming more individualistic, transcendent, and salvation—oriented, we would expect to find goddesses compatible with these other—worldly goals and expectations. And in fact, the feminine, earth—centered goddess of fertility gives way to more transcendent images of the sacred feminine, e.g.,

Isis, Sophia, Mary, and similar mother figures.

Gnosticism, then, was a movement that, like other emerging religions of transcendence, was individual rather than collective—its spiritual principles went beyond denominational or ethnic boundaries. Irenaeus, an early church father who lived about 130 c.e., wrote fiercely against the Gnostics, especially in Against Heresies, because he felt that they were so absorbed in their individually created myths that essential dogmatic truths were carelessly tossed by the wayside.

However, there are many similarities connecting Gnosticism to both Judaism and Christianity, e.g., the sacramental implications of salvation as well as the distinct contrast between the "folly" of

this world contrasted with transcendent Wisdom or Sophia. What is perhaps most apparent about Gnostic dualism is that opposing forces could not be reconciled into one personality; otherwise it would create an extremely ambivalent cosmic creator. If Yahweh was the one true God, then he had a wretched, jealous side as well as a good, compassionate one. So Gnostics postulated a higher, unknowable Perfect Father—figure and made the Biblical Yahweh a demiurqe: the creator or craftsman of the world, but certainly not the highest God. When Gnostic texts speak of "Father" therefore, what is meant is an ineffable God—head, not a Biblical personality.

The divine attributes of this God emanate forth abstract qualities that are

at the same time hypostases: metaphysical ideas that take on a life of their own. These are the aeons, and their pairings often mirror each other. Thus, in one schema, Depth is paired with Silence; Mind with Truth; Word with Life, and so on. These celestial beings have a variety of powers and functions, occupying and officiating over the management of their various heavens. The archons or rulers come from the lowest heaven. They are generally hostile. The first archon is usually the demiurge. According to a famous Gnostic teachers of the era, Valentinius, the cosmos owes its existence to the presence of error and ignorance, i.e. , the demiurge and the archons. The archons ruling the planetary zones are Pride (hubris), which belongs to Jupiter; Envy, the archon of the Moon; Wrath,

associated with Mars; Lust, which is under the auspices of Venus; Sloth, related to Saturn; Greed, the archon of the Sun; and Falsehood, which belongs to Mercury. Separating the lower worlds from the higher world is "horos," the Boundary.

At the top of the pantheon is usually a 3-fold Deity, which Christians identified as the Trinity; however, it rarely was perceived as all male. Its 3-fold categories of thought were generally characterized as Nous (Mind), Ennoia (Thought) and Logos (Reason or Word). The Valentinian Gnostic demiurge has much in common with Platonic myth and has inherited its dualism in the split between transcendent Wisdom and Achamoth, the manifest or immanent daughter of Sophia. However, unlike

their Platonic counterparts, Gnostic myths generally represent the second member of the divine triad as female. The natural result of this is that the redemptive functions of the feminine principle are stressed, alongside her own fallen nature. However, the structure of Gnostic cosmology does not generally need to explain fall and alienation from God in terms of sinful disobedience, a common interpretation of the Adam—Eve myth. Rather, it seeks to explain the distance between the divine world and this one, and therefore postulates a cosmological structure—its magical pantheon—which acts as the intermediary agents bringing humanity knowledge of the divine world. Throughout Gnostic literature, the stage is set for various enactments of the descent and restoration of the fallen

female, i.e., Sophia, albeit she often appears under other names: Barbelo, Zoe, Psyche, Achamoth.

Like Isis, Sophia's existence becomes split into a multiplicity of forms; in fact, Valentinus, who promulgated perhaps the most popular form of Gnosticism, could well have been influenced not only by Platonic parallels in the formation of creation myths, but also by Plutarch, the author of On Isis arid Qsiris, and, of course, the famous Jewish patriarch in the ancient world, Philo (13 BCE - 45 CE). However, although similarities may exist between Philonic and Gnostic anthropologies, there are also clear distinctions which should be kept in mind: according to Philo's world view, the human being is the crown of creation; to the Gnostic, humans are

little more than aliens in the world. For Philo, God is the monotheistic creator and preserver of the world; for the Gnostic, God is divided into a transcendent Deity and an inferior Creator. As June Singer explains, the Gnostic God is "neither begotten, nor does he create worlds, and in this respect, stands in contrast to all other tribal gods and world gods of the historic religions."(5)

However, because even to Philo, God as transcendent abstract Deity was incomprehensible, intermediary figures were needed to connect the created world to the ineffable. Philo was perhaps the first to clearly elaborate upon the connection between Word or Logos with Wisdom/Sophia: "This issues forth out of Eden: the Sophia of God, and this is

the Logos of God." (6)

Elsewhere he describes Sophia as the "first-born Mother of all things" and the Logos as "the eldest-born image of God." (7) His precedent for making these associations, however, was already clearly in place, for Old Testament literature also associated the "Wisdom which formed humans" (Wisdom 9:1-2) and the Word, as divine intermediary, by whom all things were made. Elsewhere Philo speaks of an androgynous Deity, the ‘metropator’ or ‘father-mother.' Gnostic scholar Gilles Quispel sees this same androgynous figure of a father-mother goddess in the figure of Barbello in the Apocryphon of John and other pre-Valentinian texts. In analyzing the hypostatization of the mythic Sophia figure, Quispel finds the most obvious

precedent to be Simon Magus and his Helen. Simonean Gnosis relates how Sophia "is said to have shown herself to the archons, the rulers of the world, sometimes in the form of a man and at other times in the form of a woman." (9)

In the more Christian Gnostic pantheons, this androgynous nature of Sophia is most fully developed, perhaps, in the figure of Christ, which we will examine more in due course.

The church father Irenaeus assumed that Simon Magus was the founder of Gnosticism. The prototype of the goddess Sophia was none other than the mythic Helen. And, in the Clementine Homilies, we are told that "Simon goes about in the company of Helen and, even until now, stirs up the crowds. He says

that he has brought down this Helen from the highest heavens to the world; she is the Queen, since she is all-maternal Being and Wisdom (Sophia)." (10) Helen was purported to have been a historic person, therefore, who was later mythologized. She was envisioned as a moon virgin who had been abducted and made to live on earth. She is thus the prototype of the Greek concept of the soul, the anima. The "garments of glory" once worn by the soul before its descent into matter is the recurring Platonic theme in the mythology, as in all transcendent goddess images of the period. Furthermore, this anima image carries with it the light of Wisdom/Logos: in Samaria, there was excavated a statue of Helen with a torch in her right hand.

Historically, Simon was said to have lived in Samaria and was married to a prostitute named Helen. Simon Magus said that Helen was the "first conception of his mind, the Mother of all" (11) who had been trapped in a female body and held captive by lesser beings whom she had created, Transmigrating from body to body, she finally became a prostitute who was redeemed by Simon, the great magician. Thus there arises the association of Sophia as both Pisits (Faith) and Prunikos who continually appears in different Gnostic texts wearing varying nuances of this ambivalent nature.
In Valentinian Gnosis, we see the development of two aeons that are both called Sophia: the upper Sophia, who is high above in the world of the Pleroma, and the other, sometimes called the

daughter or virgin of light, is found at the lower end.

The Gnostic myth of the cosmic drama tells of the fall of the lower Sophia, which succumbed to the temptation of the hyle (matter) and fell from the Pleroma into the lower worlds, where it still remained a luminous being. Some versions see Sophia's need to know the Unknowable Father to be her hubris; in other versions, she tries to imitate him by attempting to create without a partner, and ends up with an abortive image of herself, the demiurge. This fallen Sophia remains related to pneuma (spirit), however, but she now needs to be redeemed. How does this desire to know God turn into such a perverted cosmic drama? Quispel explains that: "this desire becomes excessive and turns

to passion. It is a sort of disease that first develops in one part of the body and then breaks out in another place. . .The emergence of Evil was therefore a process that took place in the divine. According to Valentinus, Evil was a kind of neurosis in the Pleroma that developed in the aeon of Wisdom."(12) Because the principal concerns of Gnosticism were the question evil and suffering in the world, and their preoccupation with Genesis and origins, some interpret the main intention of the Gnostic Sophia myths to provide a more metaphorical or esoteric explanation of the Genesis text. (13) To the Gnostic, the world itself started in disorder with the fall of the aeons from the Pleroma, and the tall of man is but an inferior copy. Dualism is, in a sense created from dualism. The human is dual

because there was a split in the original nature of God.

The motif of the androgynous Adam-Eve metaphor thus plays an important role in the cosmology, since all syzygies in the magical pantheon need to be re-united for the fullness of the Pleroma to be restored. Now, there are many variations of this myth in other Gnostic stories. In Exegesis of the Soul,(14) the soul is the subject of the discourse, which is, however, spoken of as a feminine fallen woman whose adulterous nature is emphasized. So long as she remained with the Father, she is virginal and bisexual; when she falls into a body, she loses her virginity and is "defiled" and "seduced" by the "wanton creatures" below. (127: 25-30) In Hypostasis of the Archons, Sophia is

simply accused of attempting to imitate the Father, rather than to know him: "Sophia, who is called Pistis, wanted to create something alone without her consort.. .and what she created became a product in Matter, like an aborted fetus. . ."(Hy. Arch. 94. 5—15) In the Sophia of Jesus Christ Sophia is saved by her spiritual mate, Jesus. Here, she is also the feminine being who gave birth to the world. Before her 'conjunctio' (a theme we will return to later), she is taken captive by the arrogant demiurge, Ialdoboath, who imprisons he 'light—drops' of Sophia. In some Gnostic texts, Christ is said to be the offspring of Sophia: in others, she is his consort, or the fallen woman whom he redeems.

Thus there grew up in Gnostic myth the association of Sophia/Christ and

Magdalene/Jesus and some texts point to the intimate association between the latter. Marjorie Malvern (15) argues that in the text Pistis Sophia, the universal archetype of the holy prostitute takes particular manifestation in Magdalene, who, like Helen, was redeemed from prostitution and became the woman to whom Jesus would reveal the fullness of his mysteries. We will return to a more elaborate examination of the Sophia/Magdalene theme in the next section. It is this revelation of the word which becomes salvation to the early Gnostic Christian. To quote Quispel:

"In Valentinus' interpretation of these existing Gnostic myths, Christ carried and revealed the awareness of the unconscious Self to mankind. According to Valentinus, spirit is present in man,

but it is dormant. Only the word of Christ, which awakens and reveals it can lead to self—knowledge.. .we might say that revelation is also an ‘opening up,’ which might be equated with giving birth. Through the word of revelation we are reborn, that is, opened up in order to receive the self. By means of a Gnostic interpretation of the Christian religion Valentinus provided us with a very original approach, which is not the Word and the Spirit.. .but the Word and the Self." (16)

We will explore the relationship between the "Self" and the divine Image in Part 2.
An important theme that emerges here is that of the very feminine characteristic of giving birth which is attributed to the Logos, the revealing Word. Some

feminist writers have analyzed that Wisdom (Sophia) turned Word (masculine Logos) was part of the ‘patriarchal takeover,' where Wisdom was usurped by Christ, arid Wisdom functions were absorbed by the Logos. However, there seems to be an almost natural association of the two images in the androgynous character of the Gnostic Deity. In the Apocryphon of John, the Savior is revealed as both Logos and Sophia, who descends in order to redeem. He announces that He is the Father, the Mother and the Son. (2:10-15)

In the Tripartite Tractate, Sophia is, from the beginning, the Divine Logos, whose process of devolution is not a rash act but actually a fulfillment which brings forth the dispensation. In the

Trimorphic Protennoia, she is frequently called the ‘Voice.’ She is the first thought who descends as the Word and, in tact, encompasses the whole Trinity: "Now the Voice that originated from my thought exists as three permanences: the Father, the Mother, and the Son. A Sound that is perceptible, it has within it a Word endowed with every glory." (Tn. Pro. 37: 20—25) Her revelation is associated with the true knowledge which reveals the ignorance of the demiurge. Her call to self-knowledge reveals that she is quite active in sustaining order in the universe that emerges and evolves from her.

In the Hypostasis of the Archons, the most compelling set of savior figures in the text are female, represented variously as the Holy Spirit,

Incorruptibility, the Instructress, Norea, etc. Norea carries the potent image of fire, (traditionally masculine) whose breath scorches the archons, and Sophia is portrayed as sowing the seed of light in matter. These two images certainly challenge the stereotypical associations of the feminine as passive recipient of salvation. To the Gnostics, Christ had both a male and a female aspect: He was First Begotten Son and also "First Begetress Sophia, Mother of the Universe." (Hy. Arch.9:5) Because of the divine androgynous character of Christ, it should not be surprising that a male figure should be equated with the incarnation of Wisdom.

In a confusing plethora of images, both Christ and Mary are perceived as a manifestation of the Sophia-Wisdom

throughout Church theology and liturgy. The depiction of Sophia in Gnosticism as divine feminine intermediary is not recognized by Orthodox Christianity; out this same role is there played by Mary, the Mother of Christ, who seems to be ignored in the Gnostic texts. Both Eve and Mary have subtle associations with the 'lower,' more human Sophia-figure: this 'demoted' Sophia was the hypostatic image destined to have a unique relationship with the Christ—Savior figure. The 'Spirit' of Achamoth is derived from the light which radiated from Christ. Like Mary, the human agent of the bearer of salvation, Achamoth imbues creation with pneuma to enable it to attain restoration to the primordial unity. Caitlin Matthews has noted that like Eve, Sophia becomes the unwitting mover of the Fall who

welcomes back all that she unwittingly set loose. (17) In Valentinian Gnosis, it is Achamoth who inserted the embryo of light into the demiurgic figure so that. with the creation of human beings, the material world might become a vehicle for the reception of the Logos.

The demiurge was not able to breathe pneuma, the soul of life, into the beings which he had created, but Achamoth performed this function in order that all of the material creation could find is way back to the Pleroma. In the Tripartite Tractate, the wandering of creation back to the fullness of God takes place because spirit needs psyche. Quispel (18) sees this treatise as an extremely important document which identifies education and evolution as critical themes. The universe exists, in

fact, in order to educate the spirit. Spirit needs to go through various ethical, religious, and material exercises so that it may become conscious of itself, and the world will exist until all human beings have become conscious of God. The Gnostic philosopher who wrote this text looked at history as ‘‘ the evolution of mankind from the inferno of sensuousness to the freedom of the spirit via religion and morality." (19) This portrait differs markedly from the one painted by many of the church fathers concerning the lack of morality in the Gnostics of the day. For much of the early period of the Church, the Gnostic "mysteries" were the same sacraments celebrated by the Orthodox Church. However, in general, the Gnostics were not inclined to have any special appreciation for ritual or cultic activities

except as it supported Gnosis. They believed that not only baptism, but knowledge was the vehicle for salvation.

However, sacramental language was of vital importance in Gnostic ritual, as it was in other magical and Hermetic circles of the day. Particularly in the Gospel of Phillip, stress was laid on the profound sacredness of the Name: "One single Name they do not utter in the world, the Name which the Father gave to the Son, which is above all things, which is the Name of the Father. For the Son would not become the Father except he clothe himself with the Name of the Father." (Philip 54:6—12)

There are hints of the power of Christ's name in New Testament writings, (e.g., John 17:11, Gal. 3:27) but Quispel has

noted that the curious terminology of being clothed with the Name has particular parallels in Jewish mystical circles. (20) In the Odes of Solomon we read, "Put on therefore, the Name of the Most High." And in another magical Jewish writing, the initiate is said to: “impregnate himself.. .with the Great Name of God... [and] perform a symbolic act by clothing himself in a garment into whose texture the Name has been woven."(21) This vivid imagery is similar to the metaphorical garments in the mythologies of both Isis and Sophia, which are shed with the descent, arid the ritual of bestowing new clothes on the initiate as a symbol of soul’s ascent. In each case, the re-discovery of the garments represents the transformation of the individual. Ernst Cassirer, in The philosophy of Symbolic

Forms, has noted that, in myth, there is an interesting association between ‘name’ and its owner: "[F]or original mythical thinking, the name is even more than such a skin: it expresses what is innermost and essential in the man and it positively is this innermost essence. Name and personality merge."(22)

The Pistis Sophia is replete with imagery of the names’ and the ‘vestures’ of the souls ascent. In the Gospel of Philip it is said that "in this world, those who put on garments are better than the garments. In the kingdom of heaven, the garments are other than those who put them on" (57: 15—20), referring to the glory of the garment of Light which the soul dons who escapes the flesh and the cycles of this world forever.

Many Gnostic sacraments were practiced in conjunction with a variety of magical formulas, symbols and signs. Gnostics were familiar with the occult practices of the day related to sound, numbers and letters, and some of the vocalizations they used were undoubtedly derived from ancient sources, or taken from other mystery cults of antiquity. The Acts of John describes a mystical chant which Jesus taught to his disciples before his passion, accompanied by a circle dance. The purpose of the savior figure was not only to awaken the soul from its sleep deep in the tomb of matter, and to remind it of its heavenly home, but to teach the way of return via sacred passwords.' Generally, the souls must pass the different planetary spheres, the "watch—

posts" of the demonic cosmic powers. Often the Gnostic redeemer—figure delivers discourses which are also revelations, i.e,: ‘I am the shepherd,’ ‘I am the truth’ , etc. , thus preparing the way for his own to follow him.

In the Apocalypse of James, Jesus imparts to his disciples secret revelations for avoiding the Archons, telling them to say: "I shall call on the imperishable knowledge which is Sophia who is in the Father, and who is the mother of Achamoth. . . Then they will fall into disorder (and) will raise a clamor against their root and the race of their mother. But you will go up to what is yours."(Apoc. James 35: 10—25) Gnostic practice was as organized as of the other early mystery cults, including in its ritual component baptism,

eucharist and other sacraments, as well as various ascetic rites of purification. Perhaps most important, however, were the traditional formulae which were granted to the initiate to prepare the self for its ascent.

Sometimes miracles were regarded as proof of mastery over the world, as Bultmann has noted: "Sometimes this superiority was displayed in the miraculous odours or radiant light which exuded from their persons, symptoms which became very important later on in monastic mysticism."(23) These same kinds of "odors" and "lights" continue to be a part of the Church’s miraculous tradition, and are becoming so common today that, at any given time, there are nearly 300 Catholic commissions investigating miracles and apparitions.

It is the Sophia who emerges as the principal magnet at the heart of these mysteries, for, as the ancient church father Hippolytus tells us, it is for her sake that "Jesus asks the Father to send him forth with the seals that enable him to pass through the Aeons and to unlock their Mysteries." (24) Other Gnostic texts represent the Sophia herself as the savior, the awakener, the Spirit; in Hypostasis of the Archons for example, the Eve/Sophia figure is the one who awakens Adam, who represents the psyche in need of redemption. (89:11—20)

Here the roles of feminine psyche and masculine spirit are reversed. She is called the perfect primal Intelligence in the Apocryphon of John, attributes

which are clearly manifestations of the Logos principle, which seems to move fluidly back and forth between male and female incarnations. From my point of view, it is impossible to separate the Christ/Logos figure from Sophia, or to envision the feminine as being usurped by the masculine principle through some kind of conscious misogynistic manipulation. This is not to say that misogyny did not run rampant in certain cycles of patriarchal development, and specifically in certain church fathers. However, I do not believe that Sophia/Wisdom was buried by the masculine Logos, as some feminist writers do; but rather that there was a particularly symbiotic relationship between the two of them which was necessary for the development of Gnosticism as a mystery religion in the

ancient world.

Jungian analyst June Singer tells us that "the separation of the feminine principle from the masculine principle results in the incomplete or one—sided being…wholeness or completion comes about symbolically in the mystical marriage between the Christ…and the Sophia figure." This leads us to one of the most elusive of all the Gnostic teachings: the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene and the mystery of the bridal chamber.

End-notes

1. See for example, Marjorie Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphosis* (Carbondale: Southern Ill. Press, 1975) who particularly focuses on the dualism perpetrated in the relationship of the Gnostic Sophia to Magdalen; Joan Engelsman, *The Feminine in Dimension of the Divine,* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1979), who perceives the Wisdom function of Sophia to be usurped by the masculine

Logos; and Karen King, "Sophia and Christ," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed Karen King, (Phil.: Fortress Press, 1988) on the social relevance of Gnosticism for Hellenistic women. See also her, "Ridicule and Rape, Rule and Rebellion: the Hypostasis of the Archons," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World*, ed. James Goehring, et al (Sonoma, CA. Polebridge Press). For a more positive view, see Elaine Pagel's *The Gnostic Gospels* (NY: Random House, 1988); and Adam, Eve and the Serpent (NY: Random House, 1988); and June Singer, *Seeing Through the Visible World: Jung, Gnosis and Chaos* (NY: Harper & Row, 1990).

2. Hans Jonas, "Response to G. Quispel's 'Gnosticism and the New Testament," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, quoted in Rose Harman Arthur, *The*

Wisdom Goddess (NY: University Press of America, 1984), p. 111.

3. Rudolf Bultman. *Primitive Christianity* (NY: Meridan Books, 1956) p. 125.

4. Hans Jonas. *Gnostic: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

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TERMS

AEON: Hypostasi, or celestial being that makes up the Pleroma.

ARCHON: ‘Ruler" or power, of a lower nature than the aeons (which were pure emanations of God. The first archon was usually the Demiurge.

DEMIURGE: World creator, or craftsman; not the highest God.

ESCHATOLOGY: Theology concerning the final events in world history, or the ultimate destiny of humankind.

GNOSIS: Knowledge, usually of secret or initiatory nature.

HYPOSTASIS: Deification or personification of an abstract concept, or the elaboration of divine parts or powers into active entities.

HYLE: Matter

LOGOS: The Greek word for "Word" or "Reason."

PLEROMA: The Fullness of the God-head, opposed to *kenoma*, or emptiness, the Void.

PNEUMA: Highest spark of the soul. Pneumatics (opposed to psychics or hylics) were those who had Gnosis.

SOPHIA:The Greek word for "Wisdom."

SYZYGY: A pair of Aeons, e.g., Unbegotten Father, or Depth of Silence (sometimes characterized as separate entities, i.e, Logos and Zoe).

VIRGIN'S MILK: The "milk of Wisdom' (Sophia), a metaphor for the food of the philosophers (the lovers of Sophia), the Gnostics, as well as the alchemists.

ZOE: The Greek word for "Life."

Part 2

The Mystery of the Bridal Chamber in the Gospel of Philip

One of the Gnostic texts which give us the most information about the ‘mystical marriage’ is the Gospel of Philip. It reveals the bridal chamber as a sacrament:

"The Lord did everything in a mystery: a baptism and a chrism, and a Eucharist and a redemption and a bridal chamber." (Philip 67:26)

Some scholars see clear lines of demarcation between the disciples Peter and Philip: one, a bearer of the orthodox

Christian message, whose power was monarchical and consolidated—the ‘rock’ upon which the solid structure would be built that would last for centuries; and the other, Philip, who represented the more fluid leadership within the Gnostic circles. (26) This latter group—who also emerged from the disciples of Jesus, and included Mary Magdalene—was chosen to be the bearers of the distinctive Christian Gnostic message. Attributed to the Philip circle were the tractates *Thomas the Contender, Dialogue of the Savior, The Gospel of Mary, Pistis Sophia, The Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and *The Gospel of Philip*. Douglas Parrott, a scholar who has done extensive research in these gospels, has explained that in the Philip circle, unlike the orthodox Petrine circle, there was a "sharing of the spotlight"

among the disciples. All "have their day and then step back and make room for someone else...no one disciple emerged to whom the Gnostics looked as their founder." (27)

A number of these texts seem to reflect a Gnostic effort to remove apocalyptic concerns from orthodox gospels and perceive the Kingdom of God as a present eschatological reality. How this may have the possibility of occurring is often very ambiguous, however. One of the great disconcerting factors about Hellenistic Gnosticism is that, in its extreme dualism between God and matter, all possibility of cosmic renewal, such as we see in Jewish and Christian eschatology, is excluded. Most scholars, in fact, interpret the bulk of Gnostic thought to stress Gnosis because, in

achieving it one understands "who he is, whence he has come, and whither he goes" (28) and enjoys a kind of ‘instant eschatology’; something, we may add, that belonged not to the whole of nature and humankind, but to the privileged few who had Gnosis. It has frequently been observed that unlike the apocalypticist, the Gnostic did not conceive the world as the place of a *new* creation, but looked forward to escaping from it to return to the Plorema, the place of perfection. (29) To the Gnostic, the world was an alien place, rather like the insane asylum of the universe.

However, the problem is somewhat resolved in the Gospel of Philip because the ‘kingdom" is achieved when the initiate understands the mystery of *union* in the bridal chamber. Before we

examine this mystery of the bridal chamber, which in the Gospel of Philip, includes all the raw material for the sacramental community—e.g., prayers, liturgy, rituals, etc., we need to flesh out the implications of this second line of discipleship, particularly the singular importance placed in it on the figure of Magdalene. The "beloved disciple" who appears in the *Gospel of Philip* is not John but Mary Magdalene:

But Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' (Philip 63. 30-35)

In the *Gospel of Mary*, Peter himself, in addressing Mary, acknowledges that "the Savior loved you more than the rest of women" (10:5) and proceeds to then ask her for an interpretation of the hidden *wisdom* of the savior, which was revealed in a particular way to her. Mary then explains her vision, which is an account of the soul's journey through the Aeons, from which she was eventually released, to finally experience the fullness of the Light.

When she reveals her mystical experience to the rest of the apostles, however, Peter rebukes her, saying, "Did he really speak privately to a woman and not openly to us?" (*Mary* 17:20) A dispute arises among the male disciples challenging her authority with Peter clearly seeming to represent a

patriarchal hostility towards women s equality in ministry. Most of the apostles in this text, however, affirm the power of the Spirit communicated through Mary and go out to preach the gospel, adhering to the last words of Christ, "not to lay down any other rule or law than that which the Savior gave to them," (Mary 18:20) a clear reference to the opposition to the other laws, creeds, etc., which were being developed by the hierarchy of the Church at that time.

A conflict is again portrayed in *Pistis Sophia:* Peter complains that Mary is displacing his authority and is monopolizing time. When he asks Jesus to silence her, he is rebuked, but Mary is sufficiently frightened, and says, "Peter makes me hesitate, I am afraid of him because he hates the female race." (30)

Christ's reply, however, is that whoever is inspired by the Spirit is empowered to speak, whether it be man or woman. Here, Magdalene emerges as the heroine who, like in the *Gospel of Mary,* is the participant of the secret Gnosis of Jesus. In this text, she also absorbs elements of the goddess Sophia, the all-maternal creatrix who falls into the Chaos where, in fact, she loses her name. Mary emerges in this portrait, like Helen, a redeemed soul whom Jesus will complete through the mysteries.

Marjorie Malvern has noted a distinct anti-feminist theme in this myth, i.e, the emergence of a "Venus in Sackcloth" (31) who is the prototype of the reformed prostitute who was to dominate Western art and literature for numerous centuries. She perceives such

Gnostic speculations of the ‘fallen’ Sophia to reflect the "preoccupation and fear of sexual intercourse, a conflict resulting from a view of matter as female and evil and of spirit as male and good." (32)

In an era of turmoil and transition, however, where new spiritual themes were emerging which no longer embraced only the goddess of fertility but also goddesses of the heavens, this dualism should not be surprising. Furthermore, it does not necessarily follow that such prejudices against sex, women, the body, etc., existed as a result of dualisms perpetrated by Gnostic mythologies. It is true that many Gnostics probably saw the sexual act as one which kept the soul enslaved in an endless round of suffering, and therefore

may have practiced rigid ascetic practices. The evils of the world were perceived as so intolerable by some sects that their only version of liberation was liberation from sexuality. However, sexuality may have played an important role in some of the Gnostic sects; there has, in fact, been much hypothesized about the role of sexuality in the cult of Philip, but the rite itself was too secretive for us to ever definitively know. Most scholars feel that the bridal-chamber ritual was metaphorical. We know, however, that it was an important sacrament (not known to the Orthodox church); therefore, some ritual activity must have been involved.

Nonetheless, the problem remains: what was the relationship between Jesus and Magdalene in the Gnostic gospels, and

why was Magdalene demoted to the role of prostitute in the Christian tradition, when *there is not a shred of evidence*, as Biblical scholars have long since noted, linking her to prostitution in the Bible? Rosemary Reuther identifies an obvious reason for Magdalene s demotion to prostitute in myth:

"the powerful role of Mary Magdalene as beloved disciple and apostle to the apostles of the Lord's resurrection threaten to sanction leadership for women in a later patriarchal Christianity." (33)

Here, then, we see the conflicts of the line of Peter and Magdalene, which *also claims apostolic descent.* This assumption is principally based on John's Gospel where, after arriving at

the tomb and seeing Jesus, Mary becomes, at his request an active participant in announcing the miracle of the resurrection. Perhaps because she was the first to ‘proclaim" the good news (the gospel), she is, even today, the patron saint of preachers. This explanation is intriguing, but it is only the political one.

There is also another, more esoteric, interpretation. Those who enter the bridal chamber have already ‘‘made the two one" perhaps, because, like in the *Gospel of Thomas*, the initiates are already "solitaries."(ll,2:l06) The more ancient understanding of a "sacred prostitute’’ was one who was "one-in-herself." In the *Gospel of Philip*, this is the stage of *living in the spirit;* it is equated with entering the kingdom,

which normally earthly men and women cannot enter, unless they re-create the state of the pre-paradisial Fall through the mystery of the bridal chamber. The special relationship between Jesus and Magdalene reflects the relationship between the savior and initiate figures in the gospel, and they are explicitly referred to as *spiritual spouses*. (*Philip* 63:34) This spiritual goal of balancing the complementary relationship between male and female is a psychological one which Carl Jung saw as necessary for individuation. In *Philip*, Mary personifies the syzygos of Jesus, whose presence is necessary for the creation of spiritual offspring. It is in this context that Gnostic scholar Jorunn Buckley sees the special character of the kiss (quoted earlier in *Philip* 63.35): "The Logos lives in those whom he has

kissed, hence the disciples' jealousy! for they are not yet worthy of the kiss." (34) The remarkably intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary is hinted at in John's resurrection gospel. When Christ appeared to Magdalene, she at first did not recognize him—until he said one word: her *name*.

Actually, the misinterpretation of Mary as converted prostitute occurs through a convoluted convergence of Biblical texts. References are made in *Luke* 7:36-50 to a sinner wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair, but the passage never identifies this person as Magdalene, but only as an anonymous woman. The gospel passage most frequently associated with her is the one in *Mark*, where she comes in to anoint the *head* of Christ. This anointing took place at

Bethany, where legend reports Mary to have lived. What happens in this scene? A woman comes in with an alabaster jar of perfume, she breaks the jar and anoints Jesus on the head, much to the protest of those standing nearby. Why waste such expensive perfume? The reply of Christ is curt and pointed:

"Let her alone...she has done what she could. By perfuming my body she is anticipating its preparation for burial. I assure you, whereever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." (Mark 14: 3—9)

The anointing ritual, in fact, tells us that Mary knew, perhaps in some kind of prophetic way, about the coming death of Jesus, something which most of the

disciples still did not understand or refused to believe. What does this gesture mean? Anointings are done by a priest *or a priestess* in the ancient world for three reasons: as a sacramental confirmation with the accompanying *new name* of the initiate, for burials, or for the priesthood itself.

According to Ean Begg, (35) Magdalene may have been a priestess of Astarte, or Isis, (perhaps this is where the association with "virgin-prostitute" comes from) before her conversion to the mysteries of Jesus. Although *Luke's Gospel* (8:2) speaks of Jesus casting out seven spirits from Magdalene, it does not associate her with prostitution. Generally scholars interpret this to mean some kind of mental or physical illness, such as epilepsy. A more "gnostic''

interpretation is that Magdalene was ‘‘saved’’ from the planetary archons which were possessing" (testing?) her prior to her initiation into the Gnosis of Jesus.

It is not necessary to automatically associate prejudices against sexual intercourse with either virginity or prostitution (and therefore with women as the cause of the fall into the material world,) as a necessary evil of Gnostic mythology. Although Sophia is often described as either virgin or prostitute, neither captures the esoteric significance of the Sophia—motif. Sophia is an archetype that defies easy analysis. He or she that would know the complete transformation of Wisdom is said to drink from the *virgin’s milk* of Sophia. In this sense, we must dig for a deeper

understanding of virginity than the "body-hating" one many feminists see as a projected image of some of the early church fathers, both Gnostic and Orthodox. The preoccupation with virginity was an obvious concern which developed for a number of reasons.

If we are stuck in the point of view that ‘dualisms are always bad’, we are prohibited from understanding Gnosticism's more hidden, esoteric secrets. In the Gnostic mysteries, the state of virginity is the opposite of the state of being defiled by the archons. In the *Gospel of Philip*, for example, Mary, the Mother of Christ, is a virgin "whom no power defiled." (55:27) The defilement of being exposed to the archons concerns a darkening of the soul’s light of discernment: its

opportunity for true Gnosis. Virginity implies that this Light is pure and intact.

Philo used the term ‘virgin’ in much the same way: it is the state of the soul which is receptive to the pure influx of God’s grace. In *Philip*, the "spirit" given to Adam was his mother. (70:25) This archetypal image links Sophia with Mary. For Mary, virginity was the precondition necessary for the spiritual state required of her to understand the heavenly message that she was to become the Mother of God. The ‘fall’ of ordinary humanity into the material world implies that the soul lost contact with its divine origin. In the orthodox exegesis, it is true, this fall is primarily blamed on Eve; however, Gnostic interpretations turn the tale of *Genesis* on its head. When, in the *Apocryphon of*

John Eve attempts to awaken Adam to spiritual illumination, she says:

"I am the thinking of the virginal spirit... Arise and remember, and follow your root, which is I...and beware of the deep sleep." (Ap. John 31:10-20)

In the *Gospel of Philip* it is the separation of the spiritual element (Eve) from the psyche (Adam) that was the original cause of death in the world:

"When Eve was in Adam, death did not exist. But when she separated from him, death came into being." (Philip 68:22-25)

It is apparent that "spirit" is not stereotypically identified as ‘male and good" in reviewing many of the Gnostic

texts. The principle point, rather, is that the perfected human being—one who has achieved salvation—is one who has united within him or herself the *elements of both sexes,* the union of both psyche and spirit. The function of the redeeming Logos is to effect this reunion:

"Because of this Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two." (Philip 70:10-20)

A powerful statement about this union is found in the *Gospel of Thomas:*

"When you make the two, one...and you say, ‘Mountain, move away, ‘ it will move." (Thomas 11,2:106)

Sometimes, then, the virgin is characterized as an androgyne, i.e, for example in the figure of the metropator, the Father-Mother God. Christ/Sophia thus becomes the prototype for the perfected male/female unity, acknowledged by both Gnostic and orthodox Christians (see, for example, *Gal*, 3:28, where Paul says, "There does not exist among you…male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.")

In Jungian terms this would be the harmonious union of opposites, the ‘coincidentia oppositorium.' (36) This is the condition which was enacted in the sacrament of the bridal chamber, a union characterized by a kind of virginal innocence, wherein the soul was freed from opposition or dualism.

In the *Gospel of Philip*, it is said that:

"Bridegrooms and brides belong to the bridal chamber. No one shall he able to see the bridegroom with the bride unless one become one." (Philip 82: 20-25)

and also that:

"It is certainly necessary that they should be born again through the image. What is the resurrection? The image must rise again through the image. The bridegroom and the image must enter through the image into truth." (Philip 67:15-20)

We do not know what the 'images' were, or exactly how the initiates experienced the 'truth' and the 'rebirth'; however, the metaphorical language of

the text has much in common with modern symbolic psychology, (which is probably why a major preoccupation of Jung's life was Gnosticism.) In another place the author of Philip says "Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in *types and images*." (67: 10)

References to the "bridal chamber" are also found in the Gospels, e.g., in *Mark* 2:19, where Jesus says that the "sons of the bridechamber" could not fast while he was with them. It seems no small coincidence that in the *Gospel of John*, Jesus is said to have "manifested his Glory" at the wedding at Cana (*John* 2: 1-11) And John (3:39) also describes John the Baptist as the "bridegroom's friend." Paul speaks of how *Genesis* 2:24 ("the two shall be one flesh") is

described as a ‘great mystery" for Christians.

For the Valentinian Gnostics, the idea of perfect marriage was connected to eschatology. At the end of the world, when all has been perfected, the Mother (Sophia) will re-enter the Pleroma and be re-united with the Bridegroom-Savior. The bride chamber thus becomes the entire Pleroma. Those who have true Gnosis will become brides to the angels, where they will finally put on their "wedding garments" (*Matthew* 22:12) for the heavenly marriage. Robert Grant points out that Valentinian eschatology is based, to no small degree, on New Testament metaphors of this sacred union. (37)

Irenaeus, in his polemic, Against Heresies, quotes one of the Valentinian formulas of the mystical imitation of the bridechamber sacrament:

"Adorn yourself as a bride awaiting her bridegroom so that you may be what I am and I may be what you are. Place the seed of Light in your bridechamber. Receive the bridegroom from me and contain him and be contained by him. Behold, grace has come upon you." (38)

The address, "Behold grace has come upon you" mimics the words of Gabriel when addressing the Virgin Mary, and the reference here points to union through the mystery of the "spiritual marriage" which results in the great mystery of the conception of the

Incarnation: the birth of the Christ within.

The metaphor of the Indwelling Glory which Christians saw as Christ is also alluded to in Philip in language which reminds us of the Shekinah-Glory, veiled in the Holy of Holies:

"The bridal chamber is hidden. It is the Holy of Holies. The veil at first concealed how God arranged the creation, but when the veil is rent, the things inside are revealed.., this Ark will be its salvation." (Philip 84: 20-35)

Since Christ is the new Ark, the veil is now "torn from above to below" (85:10) and here Philip seems to quote *Matthew* 27:51 directly.

The Virgin-Bride, which could represent Mary, Sophia, or the Gnostic soul, is metaphorically this veil which has now been rent to illuminate the mystery of Christian Gnosis. The author of *Philip* explains:

"Is it permitted to express a mystery? The Father of everything united with the virgin who came down below, And a fire shone for them on that day. It revealed the great bridal chamber. Therefore, his body came into being on that very day. It left the bridal chamber as one who came into being from the bridegroom and the bride. So Jesus established everything in and through these." (Philip 71: 5-15)

Later, the *Gospel of Philip* makes it clear that only the initiated can fully comprehend this realized eschatology:

"If anyone becomes a son of the bridal chamber, he will receive the Light. If anyone does not receive it while he is in these places, he cannot receive it in the other place." (Philip 86:5-7)

This mimics *Luke* 16:26, in a story where Abraham says from heaven, "so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

For Philip, the Gnostic Christian need not wait till the end of the world, for "if he has already received the Truth in images...the world has become the Aeon." (86:10-12) In other words, correct cultic practice is the application of Gnosis, that which abolishes any distinctions between this world and the beyond. To receive the sacrament

implies that one has obtained the truth present in its symbols. This is why the mystery must be experienced in both places: it must be first received below, in order to be recognized above. Perhaps, for this reason, some have seen the bridal chamber sacrament as one given at the moment of death.

Others see in it a very Christ-centered mysticism, which evades the dualism that is present in many other Gnostic texts. Jorunn Buckley, for instance, sees in the *Gospel of Philip* an exception to the prevalent Gnosticism of the time, which postulated an alien God, a divine fall and unredeemable matter. In *Philip*, there are "few gloomy descriptions of the sad lot of the fallen soul on earth" but rather a "stubborn conviction of full salvation in the earthly world." (39) The

unified resurrected initiate in the sacrament of the bridal-chamber is marked by the merging of *the image and the angel*: name and form become one. Although the creation may have begun in ignorance, the true Gnostic knows how to use the vehicles in the world to transcend it.

The Genesis legend seems to have provided the medium for the special configuration of the clothing symbolism, e.g., the "robes of skin' (*Gen*. 3:21), which refers to the body, is the replacement for the lost Image of God, which corresponds to the 'lost" body or garment of Light. Philip says "There is no other way for a person to acquire this quality except by putting on the perfect Light." (76:25) Restoration of the Image in Philip, therefore, comes about through

clothing oneself in the garments of "water and fire" (baptism and chrism), which, unlike the earthly garments, prepare the soul for ascent. The garment of Light is thus better than those who put in on for it reveals the true nature of the soul. This restoration of the Image can most clearly be seen in the Gnostic text *Hymn of the Pearl* where the prince sees in the angel of light which comes to meet him the reflection of his own true Self, or alter ego, which had been preserved in the upper world. Perhaps a somewhat gnostic Paul spoke of "putting on the new man, who is renewed…after the image of his creator." (*Col.* 3:10)

In the theology of the Valentinians, it is the division of the sexes in the Genesis story which is the root of the human dilemma, not curiosity over the

forbidden fruit. In the mystery of re-unification, demonstrated by the mission of Christ's institution of the sacrament of the bridal chamber, the original Edenic androgyny is transmitted to the initiate. It was intimately connected to the chrism sacrament, which in fact is related to Christ's very name:

"It is because of the chrism that Christ has his name…he who has been anointed possesses everything...the resurrection, the light, the cross, the Holy Spirit. The Father gave him this in the mystery of the bridal—chamber." (Philip 74: 10-20)

For the Gnostic, the bridal chamber represented the sacred enclosure which became the place of reconciliation of soul and spirit, male and female, ie. , an

end to the dualisms inherent in the cosmos:

"Light and darkness, life and death, right and left…are inseparable. (but) neither are the good good, nor the evil evil...each one will dissolve into its original nature. But those who are exalted above the world are indissoluble, eternal." (Philip 53:10—25)

The message here is a very mystical one: knower and known merge into the other, In one place the text says: "God is a man-eater.' (*Philip* 63:1) God consumes humans because the human is made in the *likeness* (image) of God; sharing in God's divinity, the human is, therefore, food fit for God.

In the bridal chamber opposites meet in God, represented by Light and Will:

"It belongs not to desire but to the will. It belongs not to the darkness or the night, but to the day and the light…Those who are separated will be united (and) will be filled. Every one who will enter the bridal chamber will kindle the light, for it turns just as in marriages…(observed) at night...But the mysteries of this marriage are perfected rather in the day and in the light. Neither that day not its light ever sets. " (82.5—86.5)

Mary Magdalene, then, is the beloved disciple and the prototype of the perfected soul because, through her favored and unique relationship with Christ, she has entered into the perfect of

Adam/Eve, then by becoming a perfected human being, Mary becomes, like Christ, androgynous, a true spiritual being. The Magdalene myth recapitulates the fall of both Sophia and Helen; and in rediscovering her divinity, she becomes a model for the soul who seeks to do the same.

It has been much debated if, in fact, the bridal chamber mystery was some kind of 'hieros gamos', like the more ancient fertility rites that were physically acted out. However, the literal analysis will remain as much of a mystery as what 'really' went on at any of the mystery schools. The esoteric significance holds much more promise in terms of interpretation. The image of the bridal chamber is an obvious symbol of the 'conjunctio.' This divine union which is

represented in marriage or sacred partnership reflects an *archetypal unity* which is part of the human drama. It points to an original androgynous unity which in the *Gospel of Philip* significantly pictures salvation as equivalent to a reunion of the divided Adam.

In Hebrew, Adam does not mean "man.' The word meaning a "man" is "ish." ‘Adam" means "mortal" or "human being," signifying an androgynous unity. An ancient Jewish midrash says, "Man and woman were originally undivided," that is, Adam was at first created bisexual a hermaphrodite. (40) Philo wrote that the original Human Being, the "Adam" (or Adam Kadmon) preceded the Biblical Adam, the perfect human who would return to the world at the

time of redemption.(41) We have seen that this savior—motif is repeatedly characterized in the Gnostic literature as variously female as well as male, because the syzygy metaphor is at the so much variation in the Gnostic texts, it is difficult to even stereotype the transcendent ‘spirit’ world as masculine and the material world as feminine, In the *Tremorphic Protennoia*, for example, masculinity is identified with the fallen world and the spiritual elevated feminine principle is seen to be the revealer of Light. Other examples have been given previously.

Sophia is an archetype that defies stereotyping. Jungian Erich Neumann perceives the Sophia as being the most elevated form of the feminine principle:

"As spirit Mother, she is not, like the Great Nother of the lower phase, interested primarily in the infant, the child, the immature man who clings to her in these early stages...[she] governs the transformation from the elementary to the spiritual level...[she] desires whole men knowing life in all its breadth." (42)

This is the function of Wisdom, patiently waiting, yet always eluding our complete understanding until the whole person is prepared; until the individuation process is complete.

Sophia/Magdalene is a paradoxical image until we interpret her in the light of the esoteric significance of the bridal-chamber. I see the sexual metaphors alluded to in the myths as intimately

linked to those secret places of wisdom, hard to grasp. There are difficulties and risks inherent in approaching her. She is not always easy to relate to. She is, after all, a type of hetaira, a ‘virgin-prostitute", who is one-in-herself. She is unrelatable. perhaps, because she is detached. She is secret knowledge. reserved for those few who have the courage and persistance to continue to search for her and grapple with her mysteries. The hearer of true Gnosis is being called to follow this Wisdom, despite the fact that she may not always be honored by this world. Magdalene may also represent the dark side of the Virgin

Mary herself, historically portrayed by the Church as lily white. She is perhaps the secret part of our own selves which

we cannot so easily analyze, decipher, or understand. Magdalene will continue to remain one of the most mysterious of the Gnostic and Christian myths precisely because she refuses to be categorically fit into a box: whether it be a virgin box, a whore box, a Christian box, a feminist box…she is, in the last analysis, ineffable, arid she remains a mystery.

In her dualism, Sophia is indeed an ambivalent image. She is the symbol of life, earth, and the striving human soul in her fallen aspect as Achamoth. However, consistent in even her immanent aspect, the Sophia figure is portrayed as active, divine and powerful. But ultimately, Sophia is a reflection of the highest power of the saving Word, the Voice that internally beckons. She is, perhaps, the light at the end of the tunnel

we catch qlimpses of through a sometimes hard-won Wisdom.

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36. For example, Jung's work *Mysterium Conjunctionis* Trans. By RFC Hull (London: Routeledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

37. Robert Grant, "The Mystery of Marriage in the Gospel of Philip" in Vigiliae Christianae # 15 (1961), pp. 129-140.

38. Irenaeus, quoted in Grant, p. 132.

39. Jorunn J. Buckley, "A Cult-Mystery in the Gospel of Philip"Journal of Biblical Literature, V.99, (1980), p. 575.

40. Genesis Rabbah 8:1.

41. Philo, summarized by Samuel Sandmel, *Philo's place in Judaism* (N.Y. : KTAV, 1971), pp. xxi, 100.

42. Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 331.